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ABSTRACT

Based on the notion that children will rewrite willingly if given a definite purpose, three alternatives for revision connect the necessity of revision to the students' acceptance and desire to revise. The first alternative is to have the children revise their original story format, where the basic storyline remains the same, but the ideas, vocabulary, and sentence structure are expanded. Another suggestion is to have the students rewrite their stories for a different audience. For example, intermediate level students would redraft stories for primary students by conferencing with the younger children about their preferences and understanding. The third idea is to have students revise their stories with the use of the computer. Students are paired with peer editors and rewrite previously saved documents to improve the original text. Interactions between various grade levels proved to be successful and motivated students to improve their original drafts. (MM)

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Rewrapping the Package: Helping Students to Rewrite Willingly

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All of the experts know that rewriting is absolutely essential to the writing process. Professional writers, teacher educators, and classroom teachers insist that children learn at an early age to rewrite, revise, and redraft until they have produced a satisfactory, finished product. Everyone is convinced; everyone, that is, except the students. Teachers usually can elicit one revision before the final copy, but asking for more than one rewrite is practically an impossibility.

Believing that revision is a necessary step of the writing process, we were determined to make it a feasible and desirable one for children. Simply stated: We have offered three alternatives for students to rewrite their stories. One idea is to have the children revise their original story format. The basic storyline could remain the same, but ideas, vocabulary, and sentence structure would be expanded in the new version. Another suggestion is to have the students rewrite their stories for a different audience. Intermediate level students would redraft stories for primary students by conferencing with the younger children for their preferences and understanding. The third idea is to have students revise their stories with the use of the computer. Students would be paired as peer editors and rewrite, at a later date, previously saved documents to improve the original text.

The theme of the 1987 NCTE Convention is "Making Connections." We, in fact, are connecting the experts' knowledge of the necessity of revision to the students' acceptance and desire to revise. Our theory is based on the notion that children will rewrite willingly if given a

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definite purpose. As first, third, and sixth grade teachers, we were able to test our theory for both primary and intermediate students with extremely successful results.

Redrafting for a Different Audience by Maureen Amick

Students learn as early as the first grade to write and rewrite their stories. The first draft is not usually the problem; the difficulty lies in the rewriting. In searching for an answer to this dilemma, we devised the format of redrafting stories for a different audience.

Students in grades one and six had previously received the assignment to write storybooks with the stated purpose of reading the books to each other. Once the assignment had been accomplished, Fran Poger, the sixth grade teacher, and I, the first grade teacher, scheduled eight half hour work periods on eight different days when our classes could meet and rewrite together.

On the first day, we divided our two classes into eight groups of six to eight students each, so the children could read their storybooks to one another. We then explained that each group was to select the storybook that could best be rewritten into a play which would be presented as a puppet show. Much to our pleasure, storybooks written by both first and sixth graders were selected for redrafting. One group decided to combine two stories into one play.

We had originally scheduled the length of each period to be forty-five minutes, but decreased it to thirty minutes which seemed a more reasonable work period for many of the children. At the end of the first day, each teacher questioned her students on their reaction to working with students at a different grade level. The sixth graders thought that

the stories of the first graders were short and undeveloped; they often repeated words; the vocabulary lacked variety; they were poor spellers; first graders were fidgety and had very short attention spans. The first graders felt that they had made some new friends; sixth graders were really good workers and good spellers; it was fun working with them; they even let first graders give some ideas; sixth graders did not have the writing problems to solve in their stories that first graders did.

By the second day, we were ready to initiate the rewriting process. All students participated in the brainstorming, but sixth graders handled the recording of ideas. Since the classroom seemed too noisy and crowded to meet altogether, we decided to have four groups meet in each classroom. Sixth graders soon assumed the role of older siblings, patiently assisting the first graders, which helped to make them feel secure.

The rewriting continued on the third day, but by the end of that period, the children were ready to decide how they wanted to present their puppet show and to distribute parts to each member of the group. As a homework assignment, sixth graders were asked to proofread the plays so that teachers could make copies for each member of the group the next day.

By the fourth meeting, the students began designing their puppets, scenery, and props which were completed by the fifth session in time to begin rehearsing the puppet shows. A dress rehearsal working with the puppets in a puppet theatre and practicing with a microphone was conducted on the sixth day. Days seven and eight were devoted to presenting the puppet shows to the first and sixth grade classes who had not participated in this rewriting project.

As teachers, our role was to move around the room to keep students on

task and offer suggestions if the groups asked for help. The children were so engrossed in their rewriting and designing of puppets that our suggestions were rarely needed.

We have attributed several reasons to the success of this facet of our rewriting project. First of all, the children actively participated in the decision-making process. The students selected which storybooks to convert into plays, they controlled how the plays would be developed, and they decided who would play each part. In addition, the children maintained the ownership of their writings by controlling any editing and revising that was needed. We believe another reason for our success concerned the fact that students were given a definite purpose with their writing. The assignment to write a storybook and turn it into a play, gave them guidelines and direction without discouraging creativity. Finally, research indicates that the end results will be successful if the task is enjoyable which was clearly indicated by the enthusiasm, dedication, and positive comments of our students.

Rewriting with the Computer by Ann Ogawa

Computers have become an increasingly important facet of our school's writing program. Up to the point that Fran and Maureen came to me for suggestions of incorporating the computer with a rewriting project, I had been using the basic, "write a rough draft by hand, peer or teacher edit, write a final copy by hand, copy on the computer, and turn in the final draft" method. Coincidentally, the computer aide in our school had been trying to convince me of the value of having students compose their writing directly on the computer. I was sure this could not work because without material in front of them to copy, what would students have to put into the computer? My third graders had a hard enough time copying from

their paper and using the keyboard, let alone making them think on the spot! But the more I thought about using a direct approach with the word processor, the more I became intrigued with the idea, especially if sixth graders could be used as mentors in the rewriting process.

My plan was to have my students write directly on the computer, and to encourage them not to worry about making corrections. They were just to get their ideas and thoughts down; they would have plenty of time later to retrieve their stories and make any necessary corrections or additions. One of my ideas for improving their rewriting was to incorporate a wait time so that the children could be more objective about their stories. I planned a minimum of a two week time span between the rough draft and the rewriting process. At that time, sixth graders would be asked to assist the third graders with peer editing for revisions and mechanical errors.

In the first class period, I introduced the students to the idea of writing on the computer. We discussed the benefits of using a word processor: it was faster, neater, and they did not have to worry about watching their spacing at the end of a line. We reviewed the commands for the use of PFS: Write, our school's word processing program, and spent the rest of the forty-five minute period getting started on the story writing. It was interesting to observe that the children started their writing sooner, stayed on task longer, and talked less than when they used to copy their handwritten stories onto the computer. Instead of talking to each other about what they were writing, they just wrote! After a second similar writing period, my students had enough time to complete their first drafts and save their stories on a computer disk.

After the two week wait time (which could be extended if necessary), we were ready to enlist the help of the sixth graders as peer editors.

First, I met with the sixth graders to explain my experiment and my expectations of how they would work with the third graders. We discussed how they might use questioning techniques for clarification and how they could offer suggestions. They could help with additions, deletions, and, last of all, corrections of mechanical errors.

As soon as we finished our preliminary discussion, I paired the sixth and third graders together. Since lack of space is a limiting factor in our computer laboratory, only half of the students could write at the computers at one time, while the other half worked outside the lab with computer printouts of their previously saved stories. The sixth graders working at the computers were quick to jump on the mechanical errors of the third graders. Although I had initially suggested that they concentrate on editing first, they seemed to be more comfortable making corrections and then working on the revisions. Sentences were reconstructed out of run-on sentences and other ideas were inserted or deleted. After two more class periods of rewriting together, the final products were printed.

As a spin-off activity, we decided to try third graders working as rewriting buddies of first graders with stories that they had previously written and saved on the computer disk. This time, I met first with the third graders to explain what was expected of them. The major difference in this rewriting effort was that the third grade students would do the typing as dictation from the first graders since keyboarding skills are often a problem for the younger children. Similar to the procedure with the sixth graders, questioning, editing, and proofreading techniques were discussed with the third graders. It was interesting to observe how the third grade students immediately jumped on the mechanical errors of the

first graders, just as the sixth graders had done to them. To avoid this situation, my suggestion would be to have the buddies hear the story first instead of seeing it on the computer screen so that editing can precede proofreading efforts. In addition, students need to be urged to spend more time asking clarifying questions and taught how to offer constructive suggestions.

I believe this rewriting project was successful not only because of the wait time before editing and proofreading the stories that had been saved on the computer, but also because of the many benefits reaped by the students due to the interaction and cooperation between the different grade levels. Students helped each other to learn a wealth of language arts skills on both personal and practical levels. It was much more fun to decide together how to use an apostrophe, capitalize a proper noun, or create an exciting sentence than to read about it in a book! The project also proved quite beneficial to me as the teacher. The peer work was a most effective individualized method of instruction. It freed me of some paper work so that I could have more time to listen to stories, observe the skills on which students are working, and the skills they have mastered. I keep a check sheet on each student to record this information as I circle the room. From these notes, I plan the language arts lessons that I need to teach or reinforce in my homeroom.

Would I do this project again? Not only do all the teachers involved in this experiment plan to continue meeting and writing together as often as time allows, but we also plan to inform our colleagues about our successes and to help them and their students benefit from rewriting with the computer.

Rewriting with a Different Format by Fran Poger

For the past two years, I have been teaching the language arts to five classes of 125 sixth graders in a departmentalized program. I needed a feasible plan to teach process writing to all of these students so I incorporated the use of writing centers. Each center highlights a particular writing format: biographies, photo essays, adventure journals, poetry, friendly letters, newspaper articles, storybooks, and plays. By suggesting which format my students use in their story, I am giving some guidance, but the students still have the freedom to choose the topic and all other facets of their story. Along with the teaching of the formats, I also instruct my students on the process writing steps (pre-writing, writing, peer evaluation, rewriting, final draft, presentation) and mechanics (sentences, paragraphing, plot, punctuation, spelling).

I have little difficulty in getting students to write their stories; my major problem is getting them to rewrite past the first draft. We began brainstorming for a solution, but I tried to keep two factors in mind. First of all, I did not want to destroy an already successful process writing program. Secondly, I wanted to be able to utilize the format and writing center ideas. The result was rewriting into a new format!

To begin the presentation of this idea to my students, I defined some of the terms that they would be hearing repeatedly throughout the project: rewrite (write again), redraft (form again), revise (see again), and format (the general form or organization of their story). I also explained why they were participating in this rewriting project: we were experimenting with an innovative technique so they could help determine its benefits and weaknesses; they would be offered the chance to improve

their storyline after a wait time; they would have the opportunity to correct any mechanical errors existing in their stories.

The next step was to describe how the process would work. Each student would choose one story that he/she really liked or felt was not developed. Each then would select a different format into which the chosen story could be rewritten. Not all formats were interchangeable, so much caution would be needed in the selection. (For instance, it was difficult to change a poem into a play or a storybook into a friendly letter.)

Before the rewriting could begin, the students had several questions that needed answering:

Question: Can we write a sequel or take-off of the story?

Answer: No, not this time.

Question: Can we change the words?

Answer: Yes, you can add or eliminate words.

Question: Can we change the title?

Answer: If it helps the story. (In fact, our slogan became: "Make It Better!")

Question: Can I just start adding more where I ended the story?

Answer: No, you need to improve the <u>whole</u> story. Add or delete words, sentences, and ideas, but keep the same basic storyline (longer is not necessarily better).

My job in this rewriting project would be, first of all, to conduct informal conferences in which I would help students select the story or the format to rewrite, if asked, and to question them on what they planned to expand or improve. I would also hold formal conferences as their writing reached the final stages so that I could compare their original

story with their new story ideas and could ask questions to generate more ideas, if necessary. Throughout the rewriting project, I encouraged peer evaluation and reminded students to review the evaluation comments I had written in their writing folders pertaining to the original story.

The finished products were outstanding. In the first place, I noted tremendous improvements in the story development concerning vocabulary, detailing, titles, character development, and expressing emotions. I also observed much progress in mechanical corrections for spelling, sentence formation, and paragraphing. One of the most exciting results for me was to be able to observe the improved writing techniques of my low achievers.

In analyzing the success of this facet of our rewriting project, I found several possibilities. One important element was time, which was a common factor in all three of our rewriting ideas. Researchers state that growth involves change and that change takes time. This applies to writing as well. Students need wait time in order to distance themselves enough from their writing to achieve some degree of objectivity. A second reason for our success concerned ownership: We put the responsibility for the writing and the rewriting into the hands of the author. The students selected the story that they really liked or wanted to improve, and they made the choice of the new format that would be best for their story. A third reason involved the students' knowledge of language skills: The rewriting took place in the second semester of the school year, and by that time, my students had learned more about writing techniques and mechanics. A final possibility for our success was that in the rewriting stage, the children were no longer concerned about getting an idea for a story, but, instead, were focused on improving their storyline.

"Rewriting with a New Format" was not without some problem areas,

however. In several instances, students inadvertently omitted well written parts of their stories in order to improve other parts. Many who chose the play format for their rewrite had difficulty developing the dialogue enough to effectively tell their story. In a very few instances, the original storyline was changed so much that it was difficult to evaluate the improvement, and a couple of students merely copied their story word for word into the new format.

Perhaps the best reasons for the success of this project can be found in the comments of the students:

"I liked being able to choose the format I wanted."

"I thought we had too much freedom. I had too many decisions to make."

"I appreciated the opportunity to improve my writing."

"I liked experimenting with different formats."

"When can we do this again?"